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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000271

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STATE FOR AF/W  
STATE FOR INR/AA  
DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY  
WARSAW FOR LISA PIASCIK  
CIUDAD JUAREZ FOR DONNA BLAIR  
ISTANBUL FOR TASHAWNA SMITH  
SAO PAULO FOR ANDREW WITHERSPOON

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SUBJECT: SOUTHEAST PERSPECTIVE ON THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE

REF: LAGOS 24

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Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for reasons 1.4 (B and D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: A visit to the Southeast by Poloffs to discuss the up-coming April elections with political leaders, nongovernmental organizations, and journalists indicated most Nigerians in the southeast were apathetic. Our interlocutors agreed there were only three major candidates for president, Umaru Yar'Adua of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Muhammadu Buhari of the All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP), and Atiku Abubakar of the Action Congress (AC). In Enugu and Anambra States, there is an overwhelming sense the elections will be orchestrated at the national level. END SUMMARY.

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YAR,ADUA SEEN AS OBASANJO'S CHOICE  
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12. (SBU) A March visit by Poloffs to Anambra and Enugu states showed observers doubting the probability of free and fair elections in April. Observers expressed the opinion that President Obasanjo has controlled the presidential race with the People's Democratic Party's (PDP) selection of Umaru Yar,Adua; that Obasanjo was foisting Yar'Adua on an unwilling electorate.

13. (C) Osita Ogbu, Executive Director of the Centre for the Advancement of Democracy and the Rule of Law, told Poloff that the only thing most people in the Southeast know about Yar,Adua is that he is Obasanjo,s candidate, and perhaps puppet. However, Ogbu sensed Yar,Adua is stubborn and may not be the puppet that many perceive he will be if elected.

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ATIKU FAVORED BY MANY, BUT OUT OF THE RACE  
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14. (C) In Anambra State observers felt that in a free election with Vice-President Atiku Abubakar on the ballot, he

would win that state, if not the entire country. Vanguard Anambra correspondent Anayo Okoni told PolOff that Atiku had gained a lot of sympathy because of his struggle to get on the ballot. In addition, his running mate, Anambra Senator Ben Obi, was popular and attracted voters to Atiku.

¶5. (C) Chairman of the Action Congress (AC) party in Anambra State, Ndubisi Nwobu, stated the AC blames the federal government controlled by the PDP and the Independent National Election Commission (INEC) for their lack of preparation for the presidential elections. The Chairman told Poloff INEC originally voted not to ban Atiku but the PDP's insistence and political pressure ultimately resulted in Atiku being removed from the ballot. Nwobu said the AC would seek redress in the judicial system because the judiciary has been doing a fair job.

¶6. (C) Nwobu offered his perspective on the reasons Atiku would ultimately be successful if free and fair elections were to take place. Nwobu said he believes Atiku is a liberal-minded politician who had the ability to de-tribalize Nigeria.

¶7. (C) According to Ogbu, everyday people in civil society support Atiku because of his opposition to Obasanjo,s third-term attempt. They respect his ability to stand up to the president, However, Ogbu said Obasanjo is obsessed with his own survival and legacy and will prevent Atiku from ever getting on a ballot.

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BUHARI'S CHANCES HAMPERED BY PRECONCEPTIONS  
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¶8. (C) When all contacts were asked their opinion on Muhammadu Buhari, some argued that his military background

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prevents him from allowing for the rule of law. However, Ogbu commented that Buhari was an honest dictator. Ogbu remarked that Obasanjo looked closely at Buhari as a candidate but too many governors objected. Commenting on Buhari, Nwobu discredited his chances, stating in the Southeast it was important that the "presidential candidate not be an Islamic fanatic".

¶9. (C) Nwakamma,s impression of Buhari,s chances in the Southeast are that he could win the presidential vote in the Southeast because people have written off Atiku. Observers thought many voters would split their vote, voting for one party for governor and another party in the presidential race. In this scenario, in the absence of Atiku, Buhari presented a viable alternative to Yar'Adua.

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COMMENT  
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¶10. (C) The two main candidates nationally, Yar,Adua and Buhari, are the main candidates in the Southeast. Atiku's absence from the ballot has made it a two-person race, perhaps bolstering Buhari's chances if he has been able to overcome his image as a northern Muslim chauvinist. If not, then Atiku,s exclusion may redound to Yar,Adua,s benefit.  
END COMMENT.

BROWNE